

## THE 10<sup>TH</sup> ICPS CONFERENCE 2014, CAIRNS, AUSTRALIA

MARCEL VAN DEN BROEK • marcel@carnivorousplants.org

This year's conference was held in Australia as a coproduction of the Australasian CPS, the Australian CPS, and the Victorian CPS. Many people from all over the world came to listen to a host of excellent lectures, exchange ideas, meet with old friends, and also meeting some people for the first time face to face (Fig. 1). This article is a short overview of the conference; official proceedings will follow at a later date as some presentations involved ongoing studies.

I was given the privilege of opening the conference and I started then, as I will do now, with thanking the people involved in the organization of this conference. Setting up a conference is hard work, as I know from experience, and I was impressed with the results. A very special thank you is richly deserved by Michelle Leer, who handled most of the administration and general paper pushing for this conference. Michelle, magnificent job, expertly done!

The location for the conference was a comfortable room in the botanical garden of Cairns. The room was filled to capacity with people there to interact about what is sometimes their work, sometimes a hobby, but always a passion. Topics for the lectures ranged from cultivation through conservation up to the latest in research and were delivered by an international and impressive array of speakers.

I will not get ahead of things and actually produce a full synopsis of all the conference lectures at this point. I'll just give an impression of the type of lectures that were given and the conference in general.



Figure 1: The 10<sup>th</sup> ICPS Conference attendees. Photo by Jeremiah Harris.

ICPS director of conservation & research and host Greg Bourke kicked off with a pleasantly relaxed tour of Carnivorous Australia to put everybody in the right frame of mind. Using stunning pictures, Greg gave a nice overview of the diversity of this island continent with its many habitats.

Next up was another Aussie favorite, Adam Cross. Adam was quick to point out to all present that as stunning as our beloved plants are, they are also very vulnerable to habitat destruction. We see a reduction of more than 50% in wetland area over the last two centuries. As a large portion of carnivorous plants depends on wetland habitats and current initiatives for protection and (if possible at all) restoration are inadequate to halt the decline. The message delivered was to step up local and regional initiatives for cp's to ensure a decent representation in global conservation.

In this same conservation theme, Robert Cantley presented the birth of the IUCN Carnivorous Plant Specialist Group to the world after two years of preparation. This was a favorite topic of mine, as during the 2010 ICPS conference the wish to reactivate this specialist group was one of the things discussed. A specialist group can take on many conservation related tasks, but as Rob quickly pointed out, the main focus for now is to update the IUCN red list of endangered species for carnivorous plants. Good progress is actually being made. Rob came with the preparation work done by five people in the hope of recruiting volunteers to either do actual work for the group (specialist members) or lent their support (general members). Support is important as the size of the group weighs heavily when it comes to importance and priority in the IUCN universe. While the first major score had been made in recruiting Sir David Attenborough as a Patron, Rob left the conference quite pleased with 29 members in his group and even a species already evaluated (Dr. Cross practicing the evaluation process at midnight). Since then a few posts on forums and Facebook has increased the number of members and, with that, the group will soon become more visible. (If you haven't joined, please do so. You'll be updated with developments and best of all it's free: <http://www.iucn-cpsg.org>).

In the category science, Katja Rembold showed the work being done on the mapping of *Nepenthes*. Data on the distribution of *Nepenthes* species is represented in digital maps and identify the regions with the highest amount of endemism and diversity. That the islands of Borneo and Sumatra featured prominently surprised nobody, but closer inspection gave much more detail and pointed to specific and sometimes unexpected regions. Publication of this work is therefore eagerly awaited.

Three lectures went into the relations that plants have with their environment. Ch'ien Lee went over feeding strategies like capturing detritus and animal droppings. Most of us will have seen his iconic picture of a *Tupaia* using the facilities of *Nepenthes rajah* and he had many more in the same league to show us.

Caroline Schöner spoke on a more specific part of these relations by looking at the interaction between carnivorous plants and animals by addressing subjects as parasitism and mutualism. Michael Schöner followed up on that by presenting the first results of their research into the relations between *Nepenthes hemsleyana* and *Kerivoula hardwickii* (that's a kind of bat, folks).

More general, but still *Nepenthes* oriented, were the talks by Gary Wilson on *Nepenthes* research in Austro-Papua and Alistair Robinson on *Nepenthes* taxonomy of Palawan (Philippines). Charles Clarke rounded out the *Nepenthes* discussions with a talk that focused, according to him, on "some additional interesting information that the previous speakers didn't address" (he phrased that actually a bit more Aussie-style himself by the way).

Luckily for those of us not obsessed by Asian weeds, there were also some good lectures on real carnivorous plants (just kidding!).

Mason McNair gave his view on the nomenclature of *Sarracenia* and I can safely say that we won't have heard the last shot fired in that discussion. Mason is actually working on a book on the subject and no matter if you agree or not, the discussions and reasoning will make it an interesting

debate which will certainly land right in the middle of the different “needs” of commercial (and hobbyist) horticulture versus more strict botanical science.

Andrej Pavlovic gave a detailed lecture on the costs and benefits of the electrical signaling used by *Dionaea muscipula*. A technical subject, but the clear presentation guided everyone through it.

Going more back to the start of things, Andreas Fleischmann delivered a lecture on the evolution of carnivory in plants. In a lecture supported not only with great pictures, but also with clear diagrams, the audience was shown how carnivory developed at least seven times independently in flowering plants. This resulted in carnivorous plants covering 18 genera and at least 800 species that we know of at this time. A very good lecture and mandatory insight for everybody who is into carnivorous plants beyond the basic level of “that’s a nice plant I want to grow”.

Finally, on the science front, Allen Lowrie threw down the gauntlet for the next generation. He guided us along his many observations on *Stylidium* and challenged everybody to prove them to be carnivorous as he suspects is the case in at least some of the species based on said observations.

Field reports were also represented with Jan Schlauer taking us on a tour of Andalucía, Spain and showing the habitats of *Drosophyllum lusitanicum* and many *Pinguicula*’s like *P. lusitanica*, *P. nevadensis*, and *P. mundii*. Naoki Tanabe and Koji Kondo also showed us *Pinguicula* in the field, specifically *P. macroceras* and *P. ramosa* in Japan.

The final category of lectures contained two talks that can be classified as “Cultivation”. Drew Martinez gave a very interesting view on lighting in general and especially the use of LED lighting. With the savings (power, environment, and wallet) that LED’s enable now and promise for the future, this is information many growers, whether they be professionals or hobbyists, will want.

Jeremiah Harris also gave a lecture that many people will wish they would have been able to attend. He focused on several plant species that are notoriously hard to grow and told us how he manages to have these species thriving in his collection.

Besides these lectures for the conference attendants, there were two talks aimed at the general public. First of course, there was the official presentation of Allen Lowrie’s magnum opus on the carnivorous plants of Australia and there was a general carnivorous plant lecture set up for the visitors of the botanical garden that was delivered by “Füzzzy” Mijmark as only he can tell it.

Besides all of this, in my view, the real importance of conferences like these is lots and lots of exchanging of ideas and information ranging from little tips to actual information about current research that might be useful to research being done by the attendants/speakers. This, yet again, illustrates that no matter the fact that while we are not the biggest group (certainly not compared to the number of people involved in, say orchids) and despite many forums and e-mail, there is just no substitute for a face to face meeting over coffee (or beer).

On top of this all came, of course, the joy of spending time with all these “birds of a feather”, many of them old friends. A highlight that certainly deserves mentioning was the traditional conference dinner. After a pleasant boat ride on a smooth (at least to most of us) Cairns harbor, we went to a local restaurant named Ochre. The thing that makes this restaurant special is the fact that the menu consists of what is commonly known as “bush food”. In other words: kangaroo, wattle seeds, bush tomato, and the likes. Highly recommended and actually quite delicious.

After these three intense days came the optional field trips, but that is another story told in the following article.

I hope this quick overview will inspire some of you to attend the next conference in 2016.